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# The Puddle

By John J. Gordon

A brief but vicious thunderstorm had blown through the previous day. Now, only a few small puddles remained in the parking lot outside my office. Passing the window, I was startled by a flurry of activity at the largest of these puddles. A sparrow was furiously flapping its wings as it alternately immersed then withdrew its body from the water. I chuckled as I compared this bird's aquatic ritual with my own, when I was exploring a new body of water.

As I was about to return to more meaningful tasks, another sparrow arrived, cautiously approaching the same puddle. There was plenty of room for both birds but the first one was not about to share its space. As the intruder hopped closer, the first bird shifted into full battle mode, attacking with its beak and wings. I counted four attempts before the second bird gave up and was driven off. That entire sequence lasted about one minute. The first sparrow finished its recreation, then flew off. The parking lot was quiet. No other birds came to enjoy the water.

Pondering what I had seen, I was impressed by the steely resolve the original bird had exhibited, defending its territory. True, a great deal of energy was expended by the two birds during the fight, whereas a small compromise by the first bird would have avoided this confrontation. I admire steely resolve but when it excluded any possibility of accommodation, it was troublesome. My feelings shifted toward criticism of the first bird for its unwillingness to share. How like so many humans who in similar circumstances would react with, "I was here first, get out," or "I'll beat you up if you trespass on my property." Sadly, I concluded I had witnessed selfish and aggressive behavior.

Turning back to my work, it struck me. The intruder had not been willing to wait, even a short time, to take its turn in the puddle. Nor had it gone to any of the other smaller puddles in the lot. I was puzzled. Slowly I began to piece together what had really happened. That intruder truly never wanted to frolic in the water. It simply wanted to possess what another bird already had. Talk about a human trait! Too many times I had seen people crave other's possessions, not out of need but out of intemperate desire. This little incident was the second bird's fault as it displayed covetousness and jealousy.

I admit I was somewhat confused about which bird was guilty. But, in that brief puddle incident, I knew those birds had played out nature's version of one of mankind's great struggles; the quest to live peacefully together by sharing resources. And no one could deny there had been flashes of selfish, aggressive behavior as well as covetousness and jealousy; an emphatic depiction of some of our less noble traits. It was quite a lesson!

Or maybe, I saw what always happens with two birds and one puddle.